

THE SPIRITUAL ARENA

The little plain, formerly a lake bed, on which Kyoto rests is like a playing field surrounded by steep mountain decks; and it is no coincidence that temples dot the slopes of these mountains; the serene monk occupants can gaze down, from these box seats, on the action and be comforted by the belief they see what's going on far better than the players ever could.

A further psychological advantage is gained when streams of run-off, flowing like aisles between the peaks, are diverted onto the terraces of landscape gardens in which a single boulder, weathered and shaggy, looms as a mountain, the pools becoming lakes, the trickles rivers. Along the verge of the terrace, deliberate hedging screens the city out and lets peaks in the distance bump right up against those the garden's boulders imply.

To repudiate all the sticky particulars of this world, what the suppliant monk must do is straddle his hedge and gaze long and hard from one side of it to the other, until he has convinced himself that the world below is mimicking his garden. I know all about that, from writing this.

HAIKU

One foot in Japan
one foot in America
tension at the crotch.

Filipino crew
brag to me of gold teeth ripped
from Jap invaders.